

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Highway 312 Bridge Telecommunications Attachment over Yellowstone River
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2021
Proponent:	Project Telephone
Location:	A strip of land over the Yellowstone River of Section 24, Township 2 North, Range 27 East (Yellowstone River - Public Land Trust)
County:	Yellowstone County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Proponent, Project Telephone, is requesting a ± 0.731 -acre easement in the Yellowstone River for the location of a telecommunications line in Section 24, Township 2 North, Range 27 East. The proposed project involves the installation of a fiber optic cable in the public right-of-way. To complete this project, a portion of the fiber optic cable is proposed to cross the Yellowstone River by attaching it to the existing Montana Department of Transportation Highway 312 bridge across the Yellowstone River in Yellowstone County. Per MCA §69-4-101, utilities can lie within the legally cited MDT right-of-way. However, MDT has not secured a right-of-way for this bridge placement across the Yellowstone River, so Project Telephone is obtaining their own easement to reflect their utility placement.

The proposed project crossing State-owned land will involve attaching a conduit to the underside of the Highway 312 bridge. The cable will be installed on the south side of the bridge, entering the southeast corner of said bridge and exiting on the northwest corner of the bridge.

This proposed action was determined to be more efficient than a horizontal directional drill with minimal impacts to the surrounding area.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Section 10 Permit
Form 974 Structure Attachment Permit

All permits have been secured for the construction of the new telecommunications bridge attachment that is within the easement corridor the proponent is applying for.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Approve the request by Project Telephone to issue an easement to occupy a portion of the Yellowstone River for the installation and attachment of a telecommunications line to an existing MDT bridge structure. This is the most direct, and efficient, path for the cable to run.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request by Project Telephone to issue an easement to occupy a portion of the Yellowstone River for the installation and attachment of a telecommunications line to an existing MDT bridge structure, resulting in the proponent developing an alternative route for the cable.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The project consists of attaching a fiber optic Highway 312 bridge structure that crosses the Yellowstone River. There is will be disturbance of the State-owned riverbed. All points of attachment will be above the riverbed and no disturbance to the river shall occur during installation. The proposed action would result in minimal disruption to the riverbed. No significant long-term adverse impacts to geology and soil quality, stability is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed action is installation and attach a conduit to the Highway 312 bridge structure over the Yellowstone River. The fiber optic line with extend for ±937 linear feet across the bridge on the underside. All points of attachment will be above the riverbed and no disturbance to the river shall occur during installation. The proposed action is not expected to have a significant adverse impact on water quality, quantity or distribution.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Implementation of the proposed action will result in a temporary increase in emissions from equipment that will be used to attach the conduit to the Highway 312 bridge structure. Due to the short nature of maintenance, no significant long term adverse impacts to air quality are expected by implementing the proposed action.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The proposed action would allow the proponent to install a conduit by attaching it to the Highway 312 bridge. The portion of the project that is on state-owned land is entirely on the Highway 321 bridge over the Yellowstone River. No significant impacts to vegetative cover, quantity and quality are expected by implementing the proposed action.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The proposed action would allow the proponent to install a conduit by attaching it to the Highway 312 bridge. The portion of the project that is on state-owned land is entirely on the Highway 312 bridge over the Yellowstone River. Due to the relatively short project duration and minimal impacts to the area, no significant adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following species of concern have been observed in or near the proposed section:

- Snapping Turtle, Spiny Softshell,
- Sauger
- Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Pinyon Jay
- Little Brown Myotis, Hoary Bat

Bat Roosts (Non-cave) have been discovered in the area. There are also potential species of concern that have the possibility of having habitats or being observed in the surrounding area.

The project consists of installing and attaching a telecommunications line to the Highway 312 bridge structure over the Yellowstone. The proposed alternative would not disturb any state-owned land above the Yellowstone River due to the cable being attached to the existing MDT bridge structure. Therefore, there are not expected to be any significant long-term adverse impacts.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

The proposed alternative would not disturb any state-owned land along the Yellowstone River, as the cable will be attached to an existing bridge structure. Therefore, no cultural resources are expected to be discovered or impacted. No significant adverse impacts to historic or archaeological sites on state-owned land are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed alternative would be to attach a telecommunications line to the already existing Highway 312 bridge structure and would not disturb any state-owned land along the Yellowstone River. Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to cause a significant adverse impact to the aesthetical nature of the environment.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Implementing the Proposed Alternative is not expected to result in a significant adverse impact on environmental resources.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

No other projects are known on this portion of state-owned land of the Yellowstone River at this time.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action will have no significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Due to the nature of the project, implementation of the Proposed Alternative is not expected to have a significant impact on local and state tax base and revenues.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The implementation of the Proposed Alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The proposed action is not expected to cause any significant adverse long-term impacts to access and quality of recreation and wilderness activities.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Implementation of the Proposed Alternative is not expected to have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The Public Land Trust will benefit by getting a one-time fee of \$3,200.00 for the ±0.731-acre area, who is the beneficiary of a state-owned riverbed.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Joe Holzwarth	Date: 2926August July 2021
	Title: Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

After review, the proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that Project Telephone be granted a ±0.731 -acre easement over the Yellowstone River for the installation of a telecommunications line by attaching a conduit to the Highway 312 bridge structure in Section 24, Township 2 North, Range 27 East in Yellowstone County. The easement is 34' in width and extends ±937' over state ownership of the Yellowstone River as shown in 'Exhibit A.' This alternative can be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the long-term sustainable natural resource management of the area.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action no direct impact to the state ownership of Yellowstone River. The easement will allow the proponent to extend telecommunications to areas in rural Yellowstone County. There are no natural features that are expected to be impacted and produce significant adverse impacts if the proposed action is implemented.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS

☐ More Detailed EA

☒ No Further Analysis

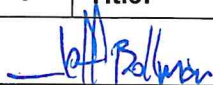
EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Jeff Bollman
	Title: Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Signature: 	
Date: 9/27/2021	

Exhibit A – Easement Location and Detail

